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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000313

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SUBJECT: KOUNDARA UNPREPARED FOR UPCOMING ELECTIONS

¶11. (U) SUMMARY. During a recent trip to Koundara, authorities, civil society and CEPI (prefectoral electoral commission) shared concerns about upcoming legislative elections, stating that preparations are moving slowly with little coordination between the various actors. Some expressed concern that if preparations did not begin soon, elections would not be feasible this year. CEPI representatives acknowledge being behind in preparations as they wait for instructions from Conakry before moving forward. While civil society appeared to be working closely with the CEPI, the youth associations seemed completely disconnected from the process. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (U) During a trip to Koundara (Middle Guinea) the week of June 2, Asst Poloff met with local authorities, police, civil society, youth associations and the Independent Prefectoral Electoral Commission (CEPI) to discuss progress for the upcoming elections. Asst Poloff also met with representatives from a local NGO, who provided their perspective on the potential for free and fair legislative elections later this year.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES DISAGREE ON
PROGRESS TOWARDS ELECTIONS

¶13. (SBU) In separate meetings with Mayor Elhadj Abdoulaye Boiro and Secretary General Mamadou Allou Diallo (deputy to the Prefect) of Koundara, Asst Poloff raised the topic of elections. The Secretary General's initial response was "which elections?" Once his advisors clarified, he commented that things were going smoothly and that the local CEPI is operational in Koundara. Mr. Diallo asserted that the prefectoral authorities are "in charge of organizing elections," but that they are working in close partnership with the CEPI. He affirmed that he and the prefect are continually reiterating to the population their neutrality in the upcoming elections.

¶14. (SBU) The Mayor also commented on elections, saying that from his point of view, activities and preparation are moving very slowly. He said that the local CECI (Commission Electoral Communal Independent) was created to work with the mayor's office to conduct a census. However, he said that since the CECI's creation, they have not begun coordinating with his office. He expressed concern about the census, saying that it must begin immediately or they will have to wait until October when the rainy season is finished. He added that if they cannot start the census until October, Koundara will not be able to have elections this year.

CEPI & CIVIL SOCIETY WORKING CLOSELY TOGETHER

¶15. (SBU) Asst Poloff held a joint meeting with members of Koundara's Independent Prefectoral Electoral Commission (CEPI) and the Civil Society Council. Present at the meeting was the President of both the CEPI and the Civil Society Council, Ibrahima Diakite, as well as members of both organizations. According to Mr. Diakite, the CEPI is on track for organizing the elections and currently waiting for the former Ministry of Interior and Security (MIS) (Now the Ministry of

Territorial Administration and Political Affairs) in Conakry to provide instructions before they can create a plan of action. Mr. Diakite also said that the CEPI cannot begin the census or start coordinating with local authorities until they receive instructions from the MIS.

¶ 16. (SBU) During the meeting with members of civil society, the CEPI openly disagreed with Mr. Diakite's statements. CEPI members complained that they were behind in organizing elections because they do not have materials, training, equipment or even a location to begin work. When asked about the rainy season postponing the census, Mr. Diakite said it "won't be a problem" while other members of CEPI and civil society adamantly disagreed, saying it will be impossible to conduct registration in time for elections if they do not start now.

¶ 17. (SBU) All members of CEPI and Civil Society Council agreed that the elections would be free, fair and transparent, but also noted that civil society needs to play a role and the CENI needs to remain free of political influence. One civil society member said that the prefect's neutrality will depend on the new cabinet appointments in Conakry, specifically the appointment of a new Minister of Interior and Security (COMMENT). The new Minister of Territorial Administration was named on June 20. END COMMENT). Civil Society Council members also discussed their role in the upcoming elections. Mr. Diakite said the council will encourage people to register and choose candidates based on their platforms. He added that the council will use a local radio station to disseminate information about the elections. A member of the civil society who runs a women's association said that her organization is working to support women candidates and encouraging women not to be influenced by their husbands when choosing candidates.

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YOUTH UNINFORMED AND DISCONNECTED

¶ 18. (SBU) Asst Poloff met with five members of a youth association in Koundara - Association de Jeune Pour le Developement de Badiar. The association's Secretary General, Mamadou Saidou Balde, complained that the youth have been marginalized and not involved in the preparations for the elections. He reported being invited to an initial training with IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems), but said they have not been engaged since then. When asked whether the youth association is actively coordinating with the CEPI, Mr. Balde said that while he meets with Mr. Diakite often, he is still waiting for opportunities for youth to get involved. He added that in the past, authorities and political parties in Koundara have not been interested in working with the youth associations.

¶ 19. (SBU) When asked whether Mr. Balde is working to get youths on the candidate list, Mr. Balde admitted that he "doesn't know how candidates are chosen." Mr. Balde said that they rarely receive information from Conakry about the elections.

NGO CONCERNED ABOUT NEUTRALITY

¶ 110. (SBU) Asst Poloff met with Souman Hamidou, program coordinator for Guinean Volunteers for Development (VGD), a local NGO that focuses on education, health, environment, agriculture, and civil society capacity building in Koundara. Mr. Hamidou spoke of the organization's programs, which are funded by UNESCO and USAID, saying that VGD decided to also start programs on civic education this year. He said VGD will sensitize the population and encourage people to choose candidates based on clear, objective criteria rather than their ethnic background, for example. He said VGD is also trying to work with political parties to encourage them to engage youth in their activities as well as put youth on their candidate lists.

¶ 111. (SBU) Mr. Hamidou said that while he believes the elections can

be free, fair and transparent, much will depend on the neutrality of the local authorities. He said that he is confident the prefect will be neutral, explaining that the prefect has encouraged NGOs and civil society to conduct sensitization programs about the elections. However, Mr. Hamidou said that he is very concerned about the prefect's deputy, Secretary General Mamadou Allou Diallo. He said that he is worried Mr. Diallo will use his position and domineering personality to influence the elections, adding that Mr. Diallo has been in office for years and has much to lose in these elections.

INSTRUCTIONS TO "REACT ACCORDINGLY"

¶12. (SBU) Koundara's Secretary General Mamadou Allou Diallo said that Minister of Interior and Security (MIS) has instructed prefectoral authorities to maintain peace. However, he said that they do not have sufficient police and gendarmes to address any issues that could arise in the event of extensive violence and/or unrest. In separate meetings with Gendarmes Commander Harouna Sangare and Police Commissioner Bangaly Deiakitate, both said security is their job and that they will work to keep peace. Asked about specific preparations for the elections, Mr. Deiakitate said that he is recruiting additional police officers prior to the election. Mr. Sangare said the Gendarmes are awaiting further direction from MIS, but for now they have been instructed to "react accordingly."

COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) When Asst Poloff asked the Secretary General questions, he seemed hesitant to respond, often pausing to first glance at others present in the room, including advisors, government officials, civil society, and CEPI. He appeared to verbally and nonverbally assert his position, and specifically, his control over the elections process. The Secretary General's comment that the prefectoral authorities are in charge of elections suggests that civil organizations, including the CEPI, are going to have to assert themselves in order to fulfill their intended roles. The fact that Mr. Hamidou also independently expressed his concerns about the Secretary General suggests concerns about government neutrality in Koundara.
END COMMENT.

CARTER